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REPRESENTED IN A

CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

APTIST MINISTERS and MESSENGERS,

Assembled at NORTHAMPTON, *May 25, and 26, 1779:*

maintaining the important Doctrines of three equal Persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal Election; original Sin; particular Redemption; free Justification by the imputed Righteousness of Christ; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; the final Perseverance of the Saints; and the Independency, or congregational Order of the Churches of Christ inviolably.

To the several Churches they represent, or have received Letters from, meeting at Nottingham, Sheepshead, Leicester, Sutton-in-the-Elms, Arnsby, Foxton, Clipstone, Oakham, Spalding, Soham, Kettering, Walgrave, Northampton, Road, Olney, Carleton, and St. Alban's; as also the many Churches not yet in the Association, who, notwithstanding, countenance it by the Attendance of their Ministers, and many of their Members:—

Grace be with you!

Beloved in the Lord!

ATTENDED by the kind care of our heavenly father, we met in safety at the place appointed. After one of the brethren had engaged in prayer, the Letters from the several associate Churches were read. These afforded a mixture of joy and grief. Many complained of deadness and indifferency. Yet some had additions, and others spoke of pleasing prospects in their congregations. On the whole, the general state of religion seemed somewhat encouraging.

We rejoice to learn, that the Churches continue steadily to maintain the able doctrines mentioned annually at the head of our Letters. We pray at their efficacy in your souls, and influence on your lives, may witness abundant increase! With pleasure we observe your affectionate love to the protestant cause. How glad should we be, if we had nothing to do but to commend and encourage! But, dear brethren, are there none who against a gracious God, injure your own precious souls, and distress the

the hearts of your affectionate ministers, by a neglect to attend in proper time on divine worship, or an unjustifiable absence from your church-meetings? Do none give occasion to some with a reproachful sneer, and to others with a mournful heart, to say, the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light? Lu. xvi. 8. Beloved! we cannot forbear to exhort, caution, and warn those whom we fervently love, and highly esteem.

We hope, dear brethren, you remember, that we have addressed you various times on some of the grand, distinguishing truths of the ever-blessed gospel; have attempted to lead your minds into a more intimate acquaintance with their meaning, importance, and excellency; have laid before you the nature, honours, and privileges of your *visible* connexion with Christ, and one another; and that the various practical duties resulting thence, have been stated and enforced. Still desirous of imparting something unto you for your spiritual benefit, we now address you once more, and shall lead your thoughts this year to a contemplation upon the important and interesting doctrine of *Providence*. It is a subject of universal and daily concern. Has an inseparable connexion with your constant conduct and comfort.

As to the term when applied to God, it is not syllabically written in the holy Scriptures. Yet the ideas designed by it, are there plentifully found. You will indulge us for a few moments, brethren! with your attention, while we endeavour to define it's nature;—demonstrate it's reality;—take a general view of the subject;—and enquire to what purposes it is capable of being improved.

As to what we understand by it, we observe, that it intends, God's exercise of his divine perfections over all the works of his hands, displayed in preserving of them, and directing all their affairs according to his sovereign will, in order, ultimately, to manifest his own glory.

Let none imagine, that it excludes, or renders improper, a wise and vigorous use of all prudent and instituted means on our part, in the pursuit of our designed ends. Nay, in it, they are absolutely included and enjoined. The certainty of Hezekiah's recovery, did not render unnecessary, the application of a lump of figs, 2 Kin. xx. 7. Nor did the lease he had of fifteen years added to his life, render needless the eating of bread, in order to support it. The purpose and providence of God regard the means as well as the end. God has declared, that while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall never cease, Gen. viii. 22. But what ideas should we form of that husbandman, who argues from thence, that he stands excused from ploughing and sowing?

We now proceed, brethren! in the next place, to demonstrate it's *reality*. This doctrine has foundations to rest upon, sufficient to warrant your firmest faith. With these we would have you acquainted. Like the Apostle, we wish you not only able to give a reason of the *hope* that is in you, 1 Pet. iii. 15; but which is essentially necessary thereunto, of the *faith* by you maintained.

Now, what can be more plain, than that this doctrine is clearly supported by express assertions in the word of God? Surely none can peruse the sacred pages, and not learn it thence! Is it not there said, that, the eyes of the LORD run to and fro' through the whole earth, 2 Chron. xvi. 9;—that his ears are open to the cries of his people, Ps. xxxiv. 15;—and, that he upholdeth them with his hand, xxxvii. 24. Was it not the joy

joy of the Psalmist, in one place, that, the LORD reigneth, xciii. 1;— and in another, that his kingdom ruleth over all? ciii. 19. How fully does the Lord Jesus Christ himself preach this divine truth in his admirable sermon on the mount! Mat. v. 25, &c. Nay, even an heathen prince was so struck with the evidence of it, that he adores the most high, as doing according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, Dan. iv. 35.

But as the detached passages in the word of God, which hold forth this doctrine, are very numerous, we will attempt to reduce a few of them to some proper heads, and in that manner present them as a specimen of what might be produced.

1. Scripture *promises*, relating to *temporal* things, imply a Providence. These evidently hold forth God as the preserver, governor, and director of all things. Here we learn, that the earth, and all the fulness of it, is the LORD's, and at his dispose. He deeply interests himself in all the cases and concerns of his people, and engages in all their circumstances to support and supply them. Behold the doctrine contended for, written as with a sun-beam in the following.

They that seek the LORD, shall not want any good thing, Ps. xxxiv. 10. Verily thou shalt be fed, xxxvii. 3. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, v. 23. No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly, lxxxiv. 11. The LORD shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, cxxvi. 6. He shall direct thy paths, Prov. iii. 6. Your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things, (i. e. food and raiment) and they shall be added unto you, Mat. vi. 32, 33. My God shall supply all your need, Phil. iv. 19. Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, 1 Tim. iv. 8.

2. The accomplishment of scripture *prophecy* is another striking discovery of the reality of a Providence. We find events often foretold for years, nay ages, before they came to pass. We have, on some occasions, the time, place, and circumstances all fully specified, and the event exactly answers to every one. These were generally delivered at a time when there appeared no human probability of their being brought to pass; nay, when seeming impossibilities lay in the way. Without admitting an all-wise, and powerful, superintending Providence, we shall be unable to account for this fulfilment of prophecy. Thus we find, Israel's oppression in Egypt, and deliverance, foretold, Gen. xv. 13, 14; fulfilled, Exod. i. 14. xii. 31, &c. Moses foretells Israel's destruction by the Romans; Deut. xxviii. 49; which was fulfilled after the crucifixion of our Lord: also, their rejection, and the calling of the Gentiles, comp. Deut. xxxii. 21, with Rom. x. 19. Ahab's death was foretold, 1 Kin. xxi. 19; fulfilled, 1 Kin. xxii. 38: also the destruction of his posterity, 2 Kin. ix. 7, 8; fulfilled, 2 Kin. x. 10. Thus the very name, and actions of Josiah were foretold, 1 Kin. xiii. 2; fulfilled, 2 Kin. xxiii. 16, 20. To these we may add those we have at large in the prophets relative to the calling of the Gentiles, which began to be fulfilled in the accounts left on record in the acts of the apostles, and continue so to be till this day. But the most remarkable of all, are those which relate to the birth, life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, scattered throughout the Old Testament, and fulfilled in the accounts we have in the New.

To all which we may add, those relative to the man of sin, defections

from the faith, &c. 2 Theff. ii. 3--12. 1 Tim. iv. 1--3. 2 Pet. iii. 3. Revel. at large. These are now fulfilling under our observation.

3. Another convincing argument in favour of the doctrine under consideration, may be drawn from the many instances we have of the LORD's hearing and answering *prayer*. Indeed, without allowing a Providence, there would be no ground for prayer, or any religious service, or spiritual act whatsoever. If we were to conclude as some do, who say, the LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not, Ezek. ix. 9; we should then justify their conduct, who cry out, it is vain to serve GOD, Mal. iii. 14; and they would be perfectly right who add, what profit should we have, if we pray unto him, Job xxi. 15. But the saints, who, in all ages, have sought unto GOD, manifested, in so doing, their firm belief of the truth contended for; and, in the event, in numberless instances, it's reality has been demonstrated. Surely it cannot but be encouraging to a pious mind to trace a few of these remarkable instances. Thus Moses prays; the Red-Sea is divided, Exod. xiv. 15, 16.---Again, he cries to the LORD, the rock sends forth water, xvii. 4, 6.---Again, he prays; Israel is spared, xxxiii. 30--34.---At another time he takes the same course; the consuming fire is quenched, Numb. xi. 1, 2.---Again he lifts up his voice to GOD; rebellious Israel is pardoned, xiv. 13--20.---Hannah prays; Samuel is given, 1 Sam. i. 11--20.---David prays, 2 Sam. xv. 31; Ahithophel's council is defeated, xvii. 14; and he hangs himself, v. 23.---Hezekiah prays, and is healed, 2 Kin. xx. 1--5.---So Mordecai and Esther pray; the Jews are delivered; see the book of Esth. at large.---Thus also, the church prayed; and Peter was delivered, Acts xii. 5, &c.

To all might be added, that every devout sentiment of praise and thankfulness; as also every exhortation to, and expression of faith and hope relative to temporal things, with which the Bible abounds, all proclaim the same important truth.

4. Another irresistible demonstration of divine providence may be drawn from striking *facts*. Facts, the *reality* and *certainly* of which cannot be disputed; the *nature* and *circumstances* of which are sufficiently plain, and without disguise; the *design* of which is as clear as the sun, and the *evidence* they give as expressive as roaring thunder.

These are very numerous. They might be ranged under many different classes. We will instance in a few.

1. Facts which to man are entirely *contingent*; happen without the least degree of forethought, design, or desire, on his part; and yet, at the first view, are full of blazing evidence that they are under divine direction, and so demonstrative of the doctrine for which we contend. Such as Hagar's sight of the well, Gen. xxi. 19.—A ram caught by his horns, xxii. 13.—The appearance of the Ishmaelitic merchants, xxxvii. 25.—The imprisonment of Pharaoh's baker and butler with Joseph, their dreams, and those of Pharaoh, xl. xli. ch.—Moses found by Pharaoh's daughter, Exod. ii. 5.—Gideon's hearing of a dream in the Midianitish camp, Judg. vii. 13, 14.—Ruth's going to glean in Boaz's field, Ruth ii. 3.—The invasion of Israel by the Philistines, 1 Sam. xxiii. 27.—David's finding a fainting Egyptian, xxx. 11.—A bow drawn at a venture, 1 Kin. xxii. 34.—The departing of sleep from Ahafuerus, Esther vi. 1. Haman's going into the royal presence the very moment the king had determined to honour Mordecai, vi. 6.

2. Facts which are *above* and *beyond* the ordinary course of nature; many

many of which it is utterly impossible to account for on the common principles or established laws and maxims of nature. These also demonstrate an over-ruling providence. As for instance, Isaac's birth, Gen. xxi. 1. Moses's rod turns rivers into blood, Exod. vii. 20;—raises an army of frogs, viii. 6;—converts dust into lice, v. 17;—procures an host of locusts, x. 13;—divides the Red-Sea, xiv. 21;—cleaves the rock in Horeb, xvii. 6;—discomfits the Amalekites, v. 11.—Division of Jordan by the ark, Josh. iii. 15, 16.—The falling of Jericho's walls, vi. 20.—Sampson's tearing the lion, Judg. xiv. 6;—smiting the Philistines with a jawbone, xv. 15;—carrying the gates of Gaza, xvi. 3.—The increase of the widows meal and oil, 1 Kin. xvii. 15, 16.—Elijah's fasting forty days and nights, xix. 8.

3. Facts which are plainly *contrary* to the course of nature, and evidently a direct violation of all it's established laws. These can only be contradicted by their omnipotent author who first established them: and, as such, in every instance, fully demonstrate an interposition of divine power. Consider such as the following: the confusion of languages, Gen. xi. 7.—The standing of the sun and moon, Josh. x. 13.—A prophet fed by ravens, 1 Kin. xvii. 6.—Iron swims, 2 Kin. vi. 6.—The shadow returns ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz, xx. 11.—Fire will not burn, Dan. iii. 27;—Lions cannot devour, vi. 22.—The belly of a monstrous fish is a sanctuary for a prophet, Jon. i. 17.—A venomous beast is harmless, Acts xxviii. 5.

4. Facts which fall under our *daily* observation and view. Witness the constant succession of summer and winter; seed-time and harvest; day and night. Behold how the sun, moon, and stars regularly rise, shine, and set, and that without a moment's deviation from age to age! We receive the fructifying showers of rain from heaven in their season. What changes take place on the face of nature according to the different periods of the year! In the winter, how dead! In the spring, what life and cheerfulness! Can we forbear saying to our God, with the Psalmist, thou renewest the face of the earth? Ps. civ. 30. Do not we evidently see a hand of divine providence through all the astonishing scene? Can the utmost stretch of charity imagine that person to have any eyes, who can say, that all this beauteous order, and undisturbed harmony, is the result of blind chance?

Having thus given you, brethren, as we promised, a specimen of the diversified proof of this doctrine, we now advance, according to our plan, to a *general* view of the subject.

1. Herein we behold a display of the *divine perfections*. There are two ways by which God has condescended to make himself known; the *word* of his mouth, and *works* of his hands. In the former he speaks to our ears; and it becomes us to listen, with the profoundest attention, to the accents which proceed from his eternal lips. By the latter he addresses himself to our eyes; and shall not we diligently attend to the lectures he thus lays before us to read? The Psalmist cries out, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handy-work, Ps. xix. 1. This holds true, whether we apply it to their first creation, or their continued conservation. We behold with wonder the universe rising out of nothing; may we not contemplate, with equal astonishment, the divine hand upholding it? Providence proclaims a God, possessed of perfections inconceivably great and glorious. Though here are depths that we cannot fathom; breadths that we cannot measure; designs

designs formed that we cannot comprehend; and lines drawn that we cannot read; yet there is enough plain and intelligible to silence the daring *atheist*, and confront the inconsiderate *deist*.

Search we for *wisdom*? here it shines: shines in colours bright and dazzling. Wisdom infinite and unerring! Cast an eye on every hand; look back into your former days; review the ages that are past; read the histories of providence left on record in the sacred pages; weigh, attentively weigh, all it's various circumstances; examine with peculiar closeness those parts where God has condescended to explain the nature and design of his divine proceedings; mark, if you can, the plan that he formed, which ever failed; produce the instance when confusion did not eventually crown the deep designs of earth and hell against his throne and kingdom; how admirable the fitness of the means made use of, to produce the ends designed! means, which proud, foolish man has often impiously dared to pronounce absurd, but never without being effectually put to shame in the end; see the beauty, order, regularity, and harmony, that shine in all his works and ways; then forbear exclaiming, if you can, in the language of the apostle, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! Rom. xi. 33.

Look we for *power*? here it appears. Power omnipotent and irresistible! What hand was ever lifted up against the LORD and prospered? What combination formed against the holy one of Israel did ever succeed? Have not the powers of earth, and policy of hell been joined in vain against the LORD, and his anointed? Sometimes their united councils have been suffered to ripen ready for execution, yet, he that sitteth in the heavens and inspects the dark caverns of earth and hell, at the last moment, has dashed them in pieces like a potter's vessel, Ps. ii. 9.* All things are under his supreme controul. Sooner than his enemies shall escape, the sun shall stand to give light to destroy them, Josh. x. 13;---hail-stones shall fall with a destructive vengeance on their heads, v. 11;---showers of fire and brimstone shall descend to burn them, Gen. xix. 24;---the earth shall open to swallow them, Num. xvi. 31;---stars shall fight against them, Jud. v. 20;---angels shall slay them, 2 Kin. xix. 35. On the other hand, in favour of his people, what mighty acts has he wrought! Sooner than they shall starve for want in a barren wilderness, the heavens shall rain bread to spread them a table, Exod. xvi. 32;---their garments shall not decay, Deut. xxix. 5;---the sea shall divide to save them, and the waters stand like adamantine walls to defend them, Exod. xiv. 21, 22;---when he pleases fire cannot burn them, Dan. iii. 27;---nor lions devour them, vi. 22. He is said to ride on the heavens for the help of his people, and in his excellency on the sky, Deut. xxxiii. 26. Nay, David declares, that in answer to prayer in a time of distress, he bowed the heavens and came down; he rode upon a cherub, and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind, Ps. xviii. 9, 10. Surely then we must be constrained to cry out, among the Gods, there is none like thee, O LORD; neither are there any works like thy works! Ps. lxxxvi. 8.

Do we esteem *truth* and *faithfulness*? yes, we justly do. These are displayed with a shining brightness among the perfections of our God, in his works of providence. Truth immutable! Faithfulness unchangeable!

Have

* What a remarkable instance have we of this in the discovery of the Gunpowder-plot, Nov. 5, 1605! The remembrance of it ought always to be dear to every lover of the protestant religion, and British liberty.

Have those promises that relate to day and night; summer and winter; seed-time and harvest, ever failed? Do we not with pleasure and astonishment see the truth and faithfulness of our God stand triumphant, notwithstanding the aggravated sins, and multiplied rebellions of his creatures; the distressing fears, and despairing anxieties of his children? Time rolls away; ages and generations sink into oblivion; mighty monarchies fall into ruins; kings and their armies are buried in the grave, but his faithfulness stands established in the very heavens, Ps. lxxxix. 2. 'Tis not only on special occasions returning once in a thousand years, we are favoured with a demonstrative proof of it, but every revolving morning, gives renewed ground to repeat the delightful song, great is thy faithfulness, Lam. iii. 23;---to which we may also add, it is good to shew forth his faithfulness every night, Ps. xcii. 1, 2. Every fresh scene of providence, whether prosperous or adverse, when compared with the word of God, will afford us occasion to say, O LORD! thy councils of old are faithfulness and truth, Hai. xxv. 1. The joyful shout of the saints to eternity will be, faithful is he that hath promised, Heb. x. 23. Nor will all the powers of darkness ever be able to produce one instance in which it has failed.

Do we admire *goodness*? here we may trace it's breakings-forth with astonishment. Our God is good, Nah. i. 7. His tender mercies are over all his works, Ps. cxlv. 9. He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just, and on the unjust, Mat. v. 45. Goodness unmerited! Bounty unbounded! How extensive! Man and beast, fowls and fishes, share therein. Nothing which our God has formed, from the loftiest archangel to the meanest insect, is excluded. It is constant and uninterrupted. Upon it we are dependent every moment of our existence. Though more conspicuous in a day of prosperity, yet not less real in a time of adversity. How free and unserved! None have any claim on God, or can demand his bounty. How high are our ideas of it raised, when we reflect upon our sin and ingratitude! Is our God kind to all; how distinguishingly so to his peculiar people! Numerous are the instances in which it is discovered, from the first moment of their existence to the last. How does it shine oftentimes in ordering their lot in life;---in giving kind parents, or affectionate friends;---in bringing about unexpected changes, connexions, or separations;---in disappointing many of their designs or plans;---in ordering their various circumstances before, at, or after conversion;---in directing their spheres of action so as to be most for their personal comfort, public good, or his own glory. And, notwithstanding their instances of unworthiness are more in number than the sands upon the sea shore, yet his goodness is like the swelling waves of the mighty ocean, which overflows and buries them all. O that men would praise the LORD for his goodness! Ps. cvii. 8.

2. We may consider providence as *universal*, and yet *particular*. The bounds of it's empire are not small. It extends over all that God has created. If we take a survey thro' all the vast regions of *inanimate* creation, we shall find the sun, moon, stars, comets, clouds, rain, dew, hail, snow, winds, and waves of the sea, all acting under divine direction. Take a view of *animate* creation; if we look upon that part which our God has endowed with *vegetative* life, we shall see, that herbs and trees, corn and grass, all grow and flourish under his blessing; the creatures which we styled *irrational*, as beasts, fowls, and fishes, are constantly supported and

and fed by his liberal hand: should we advance to the *rational* part, we shall find that men and angels, good and bad, are all the objects of his daily care.---All the changes which affect individuals or societies, kingdoms or empires, are equally under his inspection and influence. He bringeth low and lifteth up, 1 Sam. ii. 7. Not a beast can walk, or insect creep; not a bird can fly, or fish swim, unless ability is administered by his all-supporting hand.---God in a way of providence is concerned about all the actions of his rational creatures. Those that are good, he graciously influences; all that are evil, he sovereignly permits. In those, the ability to act both as to matter, and manner, are from him; in these, the ability to act is from him, but the disposition manifested in the manner of acting, from sin and satan. Suffice it to observe, that *our abuse* of that which is good, conveys no reflection upon the *author* of that good.---It is a comfort to add, that the care and concern of divine providence, extends not only to the more momentous concerns of life, as many have mistakenly imagined, but to it's most minute circumstances. Our redeemer assures us, that not a sparrow can fall on the ground without our father, and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, Mat. x. 29, 30. To which we may add, the Lord knoweth the thoughts of men, Ps. xciv. 11.

A celebrated poet, has beautifully expressed the above ideas, in the following striking lines, when speaking of the divine being:

“ Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
 “ An hero perish, or a sparrow fall;
 “ Atoms or systems into ruin hurl'd,
 “ And now a bubble burst, and now a world.”

POPE'S Essay on Man, epist. 1, line 87.

3. Providence may be considered as in *harmony* with the word of God in general, and an *expositor* of many of it's parts.

When we view the word and works of God in connexion, we shall soon see, that they cast great light upon one another. There is a beautiful harmony between them, which cannot fail of being entertaining to a pious, inquisitive mind. This may afford unto us one glorious confirmation of the truth of the word of God. There we read of his sovereign decrees in eternity; of an election of grace, and of a purpose of distinguishing mercy. Providence opens the seal, unfolds the book, and lays open the whole scene. Here we see one nation favoured with the light of the gospel, and another (a procedure that we cannot fathom) suffered to remain in darkness and delusion: one family called, and another sovereignly passed by: one individual plucked as a brand out of the burning, and another righteously left to fill up the measure of his iniquity.* Are not the pictures of the state, circumstances, trials, and afflictions of the righteous; also the temper and disposition, the frequent prosperity, and sometimes sudden destruction of the wicked, there drawn to the very life? Do not we find by observation and experience, that the maxims and principles there laid down, are such as we may cordially receive, and on them cheerfully act? There the weak state of the church of God; her numerous enemies; yet her continued existence, and certain security in the midst of all her dangers; together with the ways and means by which

* If the whole of salvation is of *meer* grace, and God was under no kind of obligation to save any one individual of the human race, where is there any injustice done to those that are left? Had not God a right to do as he pleased with his own? Where is the foundation then for the popular outcry against, and odium cast upon the doctrines of particular election, redemption, &c.?

the still spreads, are at large held up to view, to which the scene in fact exactly answers.

How frequently do many of God's people witness the fulfilment of divine promises, and the accomplishment of scripture prophecies! Nay, is it not evident, from 1 Pet. i. 11, that the prophets themselves did not understand the full meaning of many predictions; to them they appeared dark and mysterious; the reason the same apostle assigns in his 2 Epist. i. 20, when he says, they are not of private interpretation, i. e. their meaning oftentimes is not self-evident, but the accomplishment of them was to be waited for, in order to understand their intent? Have not many already become clear by this means? Are not many more daily expounding before our eyes? *

4. Oftentimes many of it's parts are very *mysterious*. It is indeed matter of joy that the LORD reigneth, but yet clouds and darkness are round about his throne, Ps. xcvi. 1, 2. Yes, great things doth he, which we cannot comprehend, Job xxxvii. 5. On many occasions in addressing the LORD, we must own with Asaph, thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, Ps. lxxvii. 19. Our God is infinite and towering in wisdom; he sees the end from the beginning; as such, regularity and harmony certainly run thro' all his goings; but in many cases, in our present state, 'tis impossible for us to discern the *design* God is in view, or the *propriety* of the way in which we are led. We are often apt to mistake the nature of God's dealings with us, and *imagine*, with good old Jacob, that all these things are against us, Gen. xlii. 36, when really they are otherwise. The LORD leads his people forward, and brings them back; lifts them up, and casts them down; and has reasons for his conduct known alone unto himself.---But with comfort we may add,

5. It's difficulties shall in a little while be all *unfolded*. We are now in the wilderness; clouds and darkness are on every hand; but Canaan is just before us. That land is full of light. The language of Jesus, considered in this view, is very encouraging; what I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter, Jo. xiii. 8. We are now like a little bark tossed about on a tempestuous ocean. Jesus sits at the helm, and guides us safely on, that we neither dash on the rocks, and be broken, or strike on the quicksands, and be swallowed up: winds and waves at times seem to mingle earth and skies, but, under the controul of our great pilot, shall only waft us the faster on. Soon we shall safely enter the harbour of eternal rest, land on the celestial banks amidst angelic shouts, and stand with rapturous triumph on Salem's peaceful shores. Then shall be laid open a view bright and astonishing. We shall look back and see, that the heaviest of our afflictions were among the richest of our mercies. We shall discern unity and harmony where we once imagined nothing but contradiction and disorder. Those things which now produce our severest sorrows, will then enliven our sweetest songs. Then will he bring us forth to the light, and we shall behold his righteousness, viz. the equity and propriety of his conduct.---We will only add
 and more,

6. The

* See this subject well handled in Fleming's Fulfilling of the Scriptures. * A book richly furnished with suitable entertainment for a pious mind. Is not a *non-attention* to the word of God in these views, one of the grand defects among christians of the present day? Hence, some parts of God's sacred book are neglected as if of little or no importance. Awful indeed!

6. The whole scene thereof is *subordinately* for the church's good, and ultimately for God's glory. These are the grand designs for which God erected the theatre of the universe. It is with a view to one or both of these, that every event is determined and brought to pass. With respect to the *former*, how full is the apostle's language, all things work together for good! Rom. viii. 28. Should we mention the afflictive parts of providence, David subscribes to this, when he cries out, 'tis good for me that I have been afflicted, Ps. cxix. 71. Peter assures us, 'tis if needs be we are in heaviness thro' manifold temptations, 1 Pet. i. 6. Sometimes a black cloud, that has threatened destruction to Zion, has burst in a shower of blessings on her head. So the persecution, which was designed to extirpate the church in her infant state at Jerusalem, proved, in the hand of divine providence, a glorious mean for the spread of the gospel, Acts viii. 1. Shall we make an appeal to the experience of the people of God? Has not the Lord in many instances first begun his good work upon their souls by some dispensation of his providence? Is it not almost universally made use of by God to carry it on? Hereby he leads his saints into a farther acquaintance with himself and themselves;---to learn their dependance upon, and obligations unto himself;---to see more of the evil of sin, and emptiness of the world;---to try their faith and patience;---to advance their humility and heavenly-mindedness: in short, to further their growth in grace, increase their deadness to the world, and ripen them apace for the full enjoyment of himself in glory.

As to the *latter*, nothing can be more plain, than that the ultimate end God has in view, is the glory of his own name. This appears with the fullest evidence upon the very face of the holy scriptures. Good men in all ages have cheerfully acknowledged it. Abraham's steward, after a successful journey, readily ascribes the praise to God, Gen. xxiv. 26, 27. Creatures may be instruments, and oftentimes do worthily as such; but their proper language is, not unto us, O Lord! not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, Ps. cxv. 1. When the Lord, on some special occasion, declares what he is going to do, how frequently does he add, for my name's sake, I do it, as, Isai. xlviii. 9, 11---Ezek. xx. 9, 14, 22, 24. xxxvi. 22.---Also, how often is this pleaded with God as the strongest argument his people can use with him in prayer on any peculiar emergency, as Josh. vii. 9. Ps. xxv. 11. cix. 21. Jer. xiv. 7. 21.

How this shall appear, that God will be glorified in and by every event, is a depth that we know not how to fathom; but we may rest assured, that his right hand and glorious arm will be so exerted, as to make himself an everlasting name, Isai. lxiii. 12.

And now our enquiry must be, to what purposes we may *improve* the subject? We shall present before you, brethren! a few inferences, reflections, advices, &c. rather in a promiscuous form, which we hope will not be unworthy of your attention.

What noble employ for our *admiring* powers! Well may we cry out, O Lord thou hast done wonderful things! Isai. xxv. 1. How astonishingly numerous the creatures of all ranks which exist in the air, upon the earth, and in the sea! How innumerable in our apprehension, their various volitions and multiplied motions! How amazing the thought, that there is not one but what is every moment under the divine direction and disposal! What entertainment to a contemplative mind to mark the beauty, variety, &c. of the springing grass and rising corn; the opening
flowers,

flowers, and ripening fruit! Here, delighted, we may range in our imagination over all the fruitful field, and rove thro' the extensive ocean! But even here we are not confined. What is all the world but like the almost imperceptible dust upon the balance, compared with all those moving worlds of light that roll in the vast expanse! These are all under the divine inspection and direction! Many, O Lord, are thy wonderful works! Ps. xl. 5. "Thyself how wonderful then!"

This is a subject that ought to be *studied*. The works of the Lord are great, fought out by all them that have pleasure therein, Ps. cxi. 2. We are under the greatest *obligations* to this employ; such as God's command, Deut. xxxii. 7. Mic. vi. 5;---he resents it, and is angry when we do not, Ps. xxviii. 5;---gratitude binds us; it is absolutely necessary, in order to a right performance of the duties of prayer and praise. As to the *manner* in which it ought to be performed, what subject, next to that of redemption, more worthy of a close and serious regard! It should be attended to universally; such scenes as are adverse, as well as those which are prosperous; and those that are prosperous, as well as those that are adverse, Deut. viii. 2. We are too apt to dwell only upon the one, according to our prevailing frame of mind. Also with the word of God as our guide, Ps. lxxvii. 13;---marking the connection of each one with another, and all the parts of each together, Rom. viii. 28;---with a composed frame of mind, Isai. v. 12;---with a devotional temper of soul, Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17. To this employ, there are *motives* of a powerful nature. It will serve to enlarge our knowledge, Ps. cvii. 43;---afford pleasure, civ. 34;---cxxxix. 17;---give encouragement in future difficulties, 1 Sam. xvii. 37;---and strengthen our daily confidence in God, Ps. iv. 8.

Here an awful *reverence* is commanded. Shall not we adore that God, who is so great and glorious! Shall not we cheerfully fear before him, who displays such an astonishing union of majesty and mercy! This view of God should fill our minds with holy *awe* in every place, and employment; whether alone, or in company; by night, or by day. How dreadfully hardened must their hearts be, who have no fear of God before their eyes! There is no excuse for the want of reverence, unless we can escape his observant eye. Rather let us say, who would not fear before thee, O king of nations? for to thee it doth appertain, Jer. x. 7.

Let us beware we do not *deny* providence. This was the awful sin of those who said, the LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not, Ezek. ix. 9. Perhaps there are but few who have risen to such an arrogant pitch of wickedness as thus openly to speak. Yet there are some such wretches as these, who deny that which every moment of their existence does demonstrate. However, there are more ways than one in which many are guilty of this sin. We may hold this truth *doctrinally*, and yet deny it *practically*. Are there none who daringly act contrary to it's expressive voice, as Pharaoh did, Exod. xv. 9;---who live without prayer, Job. xv. 4;---who trust wholly to means, without a reliance on a divine blessing, 2 Chron. xvi. 7;---who give the praise of the success of any enterprise to means, and not to God, Isai. x. 13, 14. Dan. iv. 30;---who doubt of the accomplishment of God's promises, because they do not see *how* they are to be fulfilled, Lu. i. 18;---who remain insensible under a correcting rod, Isai. xxvi. 11;---who use unlawful means to compass
their

their ends, Ps. xxxvii. 3 ;---who regard men more than God ? Mat. x. 28. If we carefully examine the nature of these evils, will they not amount to a practical denial of providence ?

Let not providence be *abused*. This is sometimes dreadfully done. To what an awful height of wickedness and impiety in this way have many run ! Insults of the most daring nature have been offered to the eternal Jehovah. How dreadful thus to hold the truth in unrighteousness ! Did the sun never shine on such monsters of wickedness as have charged the fault, and laid the blame of the blackest of crimes upon the conduct of a God of spotless holiness ? Gen. iii. 12. 2 Sam. xi. 25. Have none presumptuously expected an end, without a diligent use of the appointed means, Esth. iv. 13, 14. Exod. xiv. 15. Prov. x. 4 ;---reproached God under the trials they have met with in the path of duty, Num. xiv. 3. Exod. v. 22, 23 ;---spoken unbecoming language when God delayed the bestowment of some promised good, Job ix. 16, 17. 2 Kin. vi. 33 ;---attempted to search too deep into the reasons of the divine conduct ? Ps. lxxiii. 16. Job xlii. 3. Ought not our minds to tremble at such things as these ?

Here our *pride* is mortified. One of old observes, vain man would be wise, Job xi. 12. And, alas ! he is often puffed up with a fancied idea of his own knowledge, 1 Cor. viii. 1. But here are mysteries that have often confounded the wisest and best of men. Many, after the closest search and research, have been constrained to acknowledge their ignorance and blindness, Job xi. 7, 8. Ps. cxxxix. 6.---Let none forget, that it is the LORD who giveth power to get wealth, Deut. viii. 18. As such, he who fills, can empty ; clothes, can strip ; lifts up, can cast down, 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8. Then let not the rich man glory in his riches. Turn but the wheel of providence half round, and it converts the loftiest monarch into the meanest beggar. Remember Job, who in the morning was swimming in plenty, but in the evening sinking into poverty. Learn humility, while contemplating God's grandeur on the one hand, and man's meanness on the other, and yet the object of his constant care, Ps. viii. 3, 4.

Let every *murmuring* thought be still. God is a sovereign, and will be known as such, Dan. iv. 35. All things are disposed of according to his purpose and pleasure, Eph. i. 11. Patience is a needful and amiable grace. The christian will want it thro' all the journey of life, Heb. xii. 1. How dishonourable to God, and distressing to our own minds, to be like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, Jer. xxxi. 18. Lu. xxi. 19. God is infinitely wise in all his conduct. He knows and does what will be for our real good. Every dispensation is full of kindness ; how does it become us to receive it with calmness !

What firm footing for a cheerful *confidence* ! The christian is now called to walk by faith, 2 Cor. v. 7. Daily we have to do with God as the God of providence. He feeds and clothes us ; makes our unworthy lives his constant care. The power and promise of this God stand engaged for our good. Are our wants large and numerous, remember the earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof ; the God of the whole earth shall be called, Ps. xxiv. 1. Isai. liv. 5. Jer. xxxii. 27. Perhaps you have no visible way of support, but persevering in the path of duty, you are encircled in the arms of his promise, Ps. xxxvii. 3. He that provides for the birds of the air, will not starve the babes of his family, Mat. x. 31.

When

When sensible prospects are doubtful and dark, the promise shines bright, and the accomplishment will at length be exceeding glorious, Gen. xxii. 14. xxviii. 15. Heb. xiii. 5. Tho' trials and troubles may be like drowning floods, or burning fires, his almighty hand can preserve the one from overflowing, and the other from consuming, Isai. xliii. 2. Faithful promises, numerous observations, past experiences, and present mercies, should ever conspire to make us sing, the LORD is our shepherd, we shall not want, Ps. xxiii. 1.

Here is great encouragement for fervent *prayer*. Does his eye behold our every circumstance; is his ear ready to listen to every cry; and does his hand hold every needful good? Before him let us fall; to him make known our request; and from him expect every supply. Thus to act, we are encouraged, invited, and commanded. To him seek for direction in every doubtful path, Pro. iii. 6;---support under every burden, Ps. lv. 22;---strength for every duty, Isai. xl. 29;---fitness to meet every dispensation of providence, Deut. xxxiii. 25;---in short, for every good and perfect gift, Phil. iv. 19. Jam. i. 17.---Advancing experience may afford increasing encouragement, 1 Chron. xvi. 11, 12.

What ground of *comfort* to the saints! The government of God, which fills his foes with fear and trembling, diffuses joy thro' the hearts of his friends, Ps. xcix. 1. xcvii. 1. What comfort could a good man enjoy in a wicked world if it was not for this delightful truth, the Lord reigneth? While the throne of God stands, the christian may rejoice. When every earthly friend forsakes, or commences a foe, then, even then, we may encourage ourselves in the Lord, 1 Sam. xxx. 6. The rage of every foe he can restrain, or even cause it to work for his own glory, Ps. lxxvi. 10.

Here is matter for grateful *praise*. Praise well becomes your lips; gratitude is a suitable temper for your hearts, oh ye favourites of heaven! A view of providence in general, furnishes matter of grateful praise to all the church of God. A survey of it's exercise over each of us in particular ought to excite, ought to raise a chearful song. Is it not one of it's kind benefits that we were born in a protestant land; many of us of pious parents? Have none cause to be thankful for some special appearance of it? others that they were cast in such a town, such a family, under such a minister? Will not one for ever have cause to admire, that he was caught in the thorns, and so became a prisoner of hope, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12;---another, a happy meeting with the redeemer at a well by the way side, Joh. iv. 7;---a third, that hour which brought an abandoned thief, and a compassionate Jesus together, Lu. xxiii. 42, 43. Sweetly now at times we can, but much more sweetly by and by, shall we sing of all the way the LORD has led us.

Finally, brethren! here behold the *safety* of the church of God. All the foes of Zion are under the sovereign controul of her best friend. With these delightful thoughts, we conclude the subject, and bid you farewell. Be of good courage, wait on the LORD, and he shall strengthen your heart, Ps. xxvii. 14. Tho' men may change, and confusions fill the earth, the rock of your defence remains the same, 2 Sam. xxii. 47. Let earthly potsherds dash; let hell consult and Rome combine; let kingdoms, yea, let worlds dissolve; the heavens wax old, and time be folded up, they that trust in the LORD, shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be

be removed, but abideth for ever, Pf. cxxv. 1. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of his judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following; for this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death, Pf. xlviii. 11--14.

And now, dear brethren, to the conduct and care of this *divine providence* we cheerfully commit you all. Your spiritual welfare is near our hearts, and is ever dear to our souls. We wish to see you eminently shining in each heavenly grace, and vigorously discharging every christian duty. Soon all the scenes of private or public usefulness will be eternally over. At that important period, may you, and your affectionate ministers, meet with mutual joy, and everlasting triumph before the throne of God!

Signed, on behalf of the Association, by

JOHN SUTCLIFF, Moderator.

B R E V I A T E S.

AT the time fixed, the Association was introduced with prayer by brother Ryland, sen. After a Moderator was chosen, the letters from the several churches were read, and minutes made. Among the rest, one from Clipstone, in Northamptonshire, was presented, and the Church received into the Association. The evening service was ended with prayer by brother Ryland, jun. Next morning met at six o'clock for prayer, and settling the work of the day. At ten in the forenoon, began public worship. Brother Skinner and brother Smith prayed; brother Gill preached from 1 Tim. i. 15. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Then brother Guy prayed; brother Hall preached from Isai. lvii. 14. Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people. Brother Evans concluded in prayer.—Met again at half past five in the evening. Brother Pilley prayed; brother Fuller preached from Heb. iii. 12. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Brother Deacon concluded in prayer.—Met again next morning at six o'clock. After prayer, proceeded to the relating of experiences during the last year, which we find highly profitable; to consider the Circular Letter; and to settle the affairs of the association fund, which we wish may be vigorously promoted, as we find it very beneficial, and likely, in its usefulness to the cause of Christ, to yield much satisfaction to those churches by which it is generously supported. Brother Hall was desired to print his discourse delivered the day before, and make what circumstantial alterations or enlargements he might think proper to which he consented. After various matters had been attended to, about twelve o'clock, the association was concluded with prayer by the Moderator.

Agreed, to recommend days of fasting and prayer, on account of the distressed state of the nation; to promote *village preaching*, as being a likely method to spread divine knowledge among multitudes who are ignorant; to encourage the catechizing of children; and to print the articles of the association.

State of the churches since the last association :

Added on a profession of faith and experience,	- - - 75
Received by letter,	- - - 20
	<hr/> 95
Dismissed by letter,	- - - 23
N. B. Of these, 18, embodied at Clifton, and are all included in the former article of " re- ceived by letter."	
Dead,	- - - 13
Excluded,	- - - 6
	<hr/> 42
Total increase in all the churches,	- - - 53

The next association to be held at Carleton, in Bedfordshire, the *second* Wednesday after *Whit-Sunday*. Brother Evans, and brother Hopper to preach; in case of failure, brother Guy, and brother Skinner. — The ministers and messengers to put up at the *Angel*; others may be accommodated at the *Fox*.

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